

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2087
INFO AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 5795

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MNUC, PK, FR
SUBJECT: NUCLEAR REPROCESSING PLANT ISSUE

1. THE QUESTION OF PAKISTAN'S PURCHASE OF A NUCLEAR REPROCESSING PLANT FROM FRANCE REMAINS AN IMPORTANT DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUE AND PLAYS A ROLE IN THE PPP/PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE (PNA) CONFRONTATION. THE PPP ACCUSES THE PNA OF SAYING IT WOULD ABANDON THE PLANT IF IT CAME TO POWER, WHILE THE PNA DENIES THE CHARGE. THIS DRAMA UNFOLDS AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF PROMINENT PRESS COVERAGE OF REPORTS OUT OF PARIS AND THE STATES THAT FRANCE MAY BACK OUT OF THE REPROCESSING SALE.

2. ON JUNE THIRD, ACCORDING TO A STORY APPEARING IN THE INDEPENDENT URDU PAPER, NAWA-I-WAQT, "KURSHID QASURI, SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE TEHRIQ-I-ISTIQLAL (TI) (ASGHAR KHAN'S PARTY AND ONE OF THE NINE PNA CONSTITUENT PARTIES), DESCRIBED AS BASELESS ALLEGATIONS THAT APPEARED RECENTLY IN THE PPP'S PARTY NEWSPAPER, "MUSAWAT" THAT

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IF THE PNA CAME TO POWER, IT WOULD CANCEL THE REPROCESSING PLANT DEAL. QASURI SAID THAT BECAUSE PAKISTAN, AS A DEVELOPING COUNTRY, DOES NOT HAVE ENOUGH FUEL RESOURCES, IT MUST DEVELOP NUCLEAR RESOURCES. THEREFORE, QASURI ADDED, IF ASGHAR KHAN AND THE PNA CAME TO POWER, THEY WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO GO AHEAD WITH THE REPROCESSING PLANT.

3. IN A JUNE FOUR PRESS CONFERENCE, HIS FIRST SINCE RELEASE FROM DETENTION, OPPOSITION LEADER ASGHAR KHAN DENIED HE HAD MADE ANY STATEMENTS ABOUT THE PURCHASE OF A REPROCESSING PLANT. WE ASSUME HE WAS SPECIFICALLY DENYING ALLEGATIONS MADE BY PPP OFFICE BEARERS THAT IF ELECTED TO OFFICE, THE PNA WOULD CANCEL THE REPROCESSING PLANT. THIS CHARGE WAS FREQUENTLY HEARD DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN; WE HAVE NOT, HOWEVER, SEEN ANY SUCH CATEGORICAL PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON THIS ISSUE BY ASGHAR KHAN OR ANY OTHER PNA LEADERS.

4. THE RETIRED AIR MARSHAL HAS MADE CONTRADICTORY STATEMENTS ON REPROCESSING. IN A CAMPAIGN SPEECH IN RAWALPINDI SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE THE ELECTION, HE SAID THAT IF THE PNA CAME TO POWER, THEY WOULD OBTAIN THE REPROCESSING PLANT AND ALSO INSURE THAT CANADA RESUMED SUPPLIES OF NUCLEAR FUEL TO THE KANUPP REACTOR. HOWEVER A FEW DAYS LATER IN LAHORE, WHEN QUERIED BY FOREIGN REPORTERS ON WHETHER HE SUPPORTED THE REPROCESSING PLANT PURCHASE, HE REPLIED THAT HE DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH INFORMATION ON THE SUBJECT TO RESPOND. HE ADDED THAT THE REASON CANADA HAD STOPPED SUPPLYING FUEL TO KANUPP WAS BECAUSE THE GOC DOES NOT TRUST BHUTTO. THE GENERAL PNA POSITION IS THAT BHUTTO HAS BUNGLED THE REPROCESSING PLANT DEAL BY ANTAGONIZING A "BIG POWER" (I.E. THE US) AND THIS WOULD CAUSE FRANCE TO CANCEL THE DEAL. IN ADDITION, THE OPPOSITION HAS BLAMED BHUTTO FOR CANADA'S DECISION TO CANCEL ITS NUCLEAR COOPERATION WITH PAKISTAN AND ADDED THAT IF BHUTTO WERE TURNED OUT OF OFFICE, CANADA WOULD RESUME ITS ASSISTANCE. CONFIDENTIAL

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5. POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE REPROCESSING PLANT PURCHASE IS NOT AS CENTRAL A CONCERN FOR THE PNA AS IT IS FOR BHUTTO. WHILE THE QUESTION OF GOING THROUGH WITH THE PLANT PURCHASE HAS BECOME A OFTEN-STATED PPP PUBLIC POSITION, OPPOSITION PROTESTATIONS THAT THEY WANT THE SALE TO BE COMPLETED ARE SEEN MORE AS PROVING THEIR BONA FINDES ON AN ISSUE AFFECTING PAKISTAN'S NATIONAL PRIDE THAN AS UNSHAKABLE RESOLVE TO PUSH AHEAD WITH THE SALE IF THE PNA CAME TO POWER. CONSTABLE

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Message Attributes

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